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## **Sen. Brown's legislation provides boost for environment and farmers**

**LANSING** – Legislation designed to aid both the agriculture community and protect the environment was passed by the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Forestry and Tourism today, announced Sen. Cameron S. Brown, R-Fawn River Township. The proposed legislation would advance alternative energy sources and help control odors and pathogens originating from high-intensity livestock operations.

“This two-bill package will benefit both farmers and the environment,” said Brown, sponsor of both bills. “Utilizing the technologies outlined in these bills is one way Michigan livestock producers can reduce odor, prevent water pollution and generate renewable energy by recycling agricultural biomass – completing the natural cycle.”

Brown testified in support of Senate Bill 251, which would establish a personal property tax exemption for methane digester, biomass gasification and thermal depolymerization systems, once they are operational. “Biomass gasification and thermal depolymerization especially are emerging technologies that use a variety of waste products to generate energy,” Brown said, “I want to encourage their utility sooner rather than later. These systems are expensive, and we have a loan program available with the DEQ that can be tapped to help the ag community get these systems up and running.”

Brown also testified in support of SB 538, which would ensure that eligible farmers could obtain one-time funding through the Small Business Pollution Prevention Loan Program to build qualified agricultural energy production systems. SB 538 increases the maximum loan amount for these systems to \$200,000.

Applicants for funding cannot be criminal violators or repetitive civil violators of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act within a one-year period immediately preceding the application date. The incentives also are restricted to farms that are verified by the Michigan Department of Agriculture under the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program.

“Current (methane digester) technology is a win-win for all,” said Hillsdale Farm Bureau President Mark Wiley, who testified in support of SB 251 and 538. “Alternative energy provides a way to address environmental concerns.”

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Farmers who use methane digesters process animal waste using treatment technology that yields methane gas. In the process of creating clean energy, methane digesters neutralize harmful pathogens in animal waste to create an end product that can be used as a beneficial fertilizer for agriculture.

The energy produced in this process can be used to generate electricity for the farm or it can be sold on the energy market.

“Our state is facing tough economic times,” Brown said. “We need to look at every opportunity to create self-sufficiency in energy production. Passing these bills will help farmers stay ahead of the curve, while helping to protect the environment.”

Similar legislation was introduced by Sen. Brown last year, but was vetoed by Gov. Granholm. “We are working with the administration to ensure that the Governor’s objections are remedied,” Brown said. “I hope the Governor signs the bills.”

Industry observers feel Michigan farmers are at a crossroads, economically and environmentally. Brown’s legislation recognizes that the cost to set up renewable energy systems are very high.

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